

Introduction

The hard clam *Mercenaria mercenaria* is harvested both commercially and recreationally in South Carolina and supports a large clam mariculture industry. This report provides an update on the 2004 status of clam resources in South Carolina. A more comprehensive status report through 2003 is available at <http://www.dnr.sc.gov/marine/publications.html> under "State of Resources".

Commercial Fishery Status

Commercial clam harvests come from State Shellfish Grounds and from privately maintained culture permit areas. During the 2003-2004 harvesting season, 112 areas including 1,860 acres of shellfish beds were designated as culture permits (Table 1). In addition to the 112 culture permit holders, 256 independent harvesters were issued more than 1,700 permits for commercial harvest on 67 SSGs encompassing 8,795 acres (Table 1). Culture and harvest permits are valid for both oysters and clams. In 2003-04, thirty-nine clam mariculture permits were active, encompassing approximately 1,250 acres (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of shellfish grounds by management classification for 2003-04 harvesting season.

Summary of SC Shellfish Grounds Through June 30, 2004

Management Classification	Total # of Grounds	Total # of Permittees	Resource Acreage
Culture Permits	112	70	1,859.5
Mariculture Permits	39	23	1,247.1
SSGs (Intertidal)	54	256	221.7
SSGs (Subtidal)	13		8,573.2
Public Shellfish Grounds	20	N/A	100
Grant Areas	9	N/A	N/A
TOTALS	247		2,181.2*

* Total acreage of intertidal shellfish resource only.

In 2003-04, commercial clam landings totaled 39,869 bags of clams (250 clams/bag), of which 10,000 were harvested on State Shellfish Grounds, a decrease of 43% from the previous year (Figure 1). Reported clam landings from culture permits and

mariculture permits increased from about 16,000 bags to almost 30,000 bags. However, since 2000 reporting has been optional for mariculture operations. In 2003-04 commercial clam landings were valued at \$1,045,446, which is less than reported for the previous year (Figure 1), but this is due to inconsistent reporting from mariculture sales. Farm gate value of the hard clam mariculture industry in 2004 was estimated to be 5.75 million dollars.

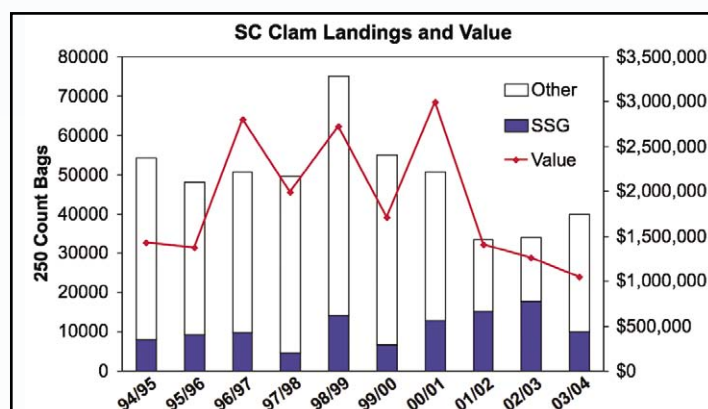


Figure 1. SC commercial clam landings (250 count bags) on SSG and other permit categories for last ten seasons (1994/95 through 2003/04). Line represents total fishery value for each year. Values exclude most maricultured clams due to changed reporting requirements.

Fishery Independent Sampling

Post-harvest assessment

At the close of the 2003-04 harvest season, SCDNR evaluated the status of State Shellfish Grounds. Sixteen had declined in quality, 15 had improved and five were unchanged. In order to allow the grounds to recover, 17 SSGs were closed to all commercial shellfish harvest for the 2004-05 season. Thirty-one SSGs were open for clam harvesting, with an additional 6 reserved for recreational harvesting only (Figure 2).

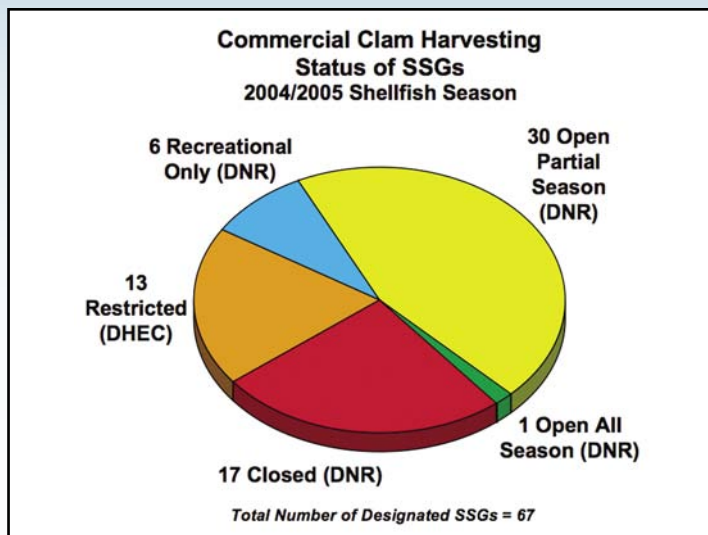
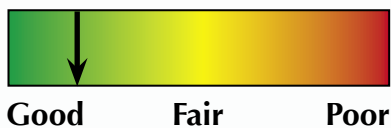


Figure 2. Commercial clam harvesting status for the 67 SSGs during 2004/05 season.

Summary

- A total of 39,869 bags of clams valued at \$1,045,446 were commercially landed in the 2003-2004 harvesting season.
- State Shellfish Ground assessments after the 2003-04 harvest season noted 16 SSGs had declined in quality, five remained unchanged and 15 had improved since the previous assessment. For the 2004-05 season, 17 SSGs were closed to shellfish harvest. Thirty-one SSGs were open for clam harvesting, with an additional 6 reserved for recreational harvesting only.



Note:

Beginning in 2000, reporting of harvested cultured hard clams is no longer mandatory. Because cultured clams represent the majority of the harvested crop, the SCDNR cannot accurately track changes in total harvest levels. Additionally, the SCDNR does not have a fishery independent survey to adequately assess the overall status of hard clam stocks. Therefore the status of hard clam populations may be subject to some debate.



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